Backstory Book

Samurai

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Chapter 1

Foreigner

Hello, Ken.

Do you remember me? I was your best friend, wasn't I?

Your partner.

Those were fun times.

Times have changed.

Now you're a true samurai and I'm a teacher—

or sensei as we called them back in Japan.

I want to write down some stuff I never told you or anyone. Before that, I want to… refresh myself; if you know what I mean.

Before I even met you, I once lived in one of the many neighborhoods of Sacramento. It was a wonderful place to live in. One day, though, my parents decided that I and my family should move to Japan. This is because my mom's side of my family demanded us to live in Japan, and, well, my dad's side isn't so needy. We had no choice but to move to Japan. This decision greatly affected mine and my sibling's lives. Do you remember them, Ken? We had amazing memories with them.

I was living in Osaka, like you would've expected. In the summer, I would have trips to Tokyo and Kyoto, the latter being where my grandparents live. I lived a few blocks away from my aunt's house. She had a family a few years after I moved in. I raised my cousin, maybe even better than her! As for Tokyo; I travel there just to

experience what tourists experience. I was technically a foreigner, so I had every right to see Tokyo as a tourist destination for me.

Everyone was fine and dandy for me, until we reach to school. I went to my preschool and kindergarten in the US, but I went to later schools in Japan, which made me anxious like crazy in my first day. Let me tell you: The first day was embarrassing! I assume you remember it all though. You were there, I remember it well enough!

I got out of my jam-packed car that was full of my siblings. The music was rolling, the bell was singing and my heart was pummeling down the drains that is my stomach. I was dressed and prepped up in my school uniform, seem to be formal and ready for everything, but in reality, it was the opposite! Once I heard the bell ring, my brain clicked and forced me to dash into my classroom. My sweat was crying through me as my feet was going through a quick rush.

I finally found myself in my classroom. My sweat was a waterfall flowing through my skin and my feet were close to breaking. Meanwhile, my teacher looked at me. He thought I was going to be a complete pushover student, at least in terms of physical strength. Look at me now! I didn't say a word to the teacher, not even a "good morning", I just took a walk to the nearest seat. The seat was between our class clown and you. You remember our class clown, right? From my memory, his name was Kenji. All he thought about was food! Dango specifically.

Anyways,

We were all introducing ourselves and it all went well. Every student was speaking in English because the teacher was from Europe. Perhaps Italian? Spanish? She was from one of those countries. Thankfully, I could understand what was going on. Due to my anxiety,

however, I was an anxious puppy when it was my turn to introduce myself. Before I had to, it was your turn. I remember looking at your curious face. You looked so sweet compared to now! I didn't mind you at all though. I was just looking at my yellow table, almost looking like I'm staring into the starry night. All hell broke loose once it was my turn. The teacher called out for me to introduce myself. I stood up and looked at all our classmates one by one. Once I looked at everyone, I gulped and stared at the ground.

"I'm Barley", I introduced myself. "Barley, hm?", the teacher repeated. She was curious about my name. I understand her. It's a weird name. Who would name their child Barley? Well, I guess my parents would. Right after she curiously repeated my name, every student was bursting in laughter. "Gaikoku hito!", the students said as they laughed. Yes, I know. They kept going on and on with calling me a foreigner. It was frustrating! Luckily, the teacher called them out and shut their mouth. Looking from now, this feeling is commonplace among the school I'm working in. My students would always make fun of non-Americans. I thought they were better and much more mature than that, but I guess I was wrong.

"Students, would you mind looking at who's the gaikoku hito here?", the teacher then asked. The students realized what they did, but that didn't mean they stopped their blabbering about me! Strangely enough, the teacher knew what that word meant too. I sat down and kept on believing that I was an utter fool. You were the only one who didn't laugh though. You were… feeling bad for me. At least that's how I see it from your body language.

After a week or so, we were studying Japanese. I was confused, as you might expect. Kenji would keep on sending me stupid notes too. He was truly an annoying douchebag. The notes got so bad that he wrote

“You’re racist just like any American!”. I gasped. I couldn’t take in what he just wrote. I don’t really understand how he came to the conclusion that Americans are all racist, but we were dumb when we were kids, yes? I looked at him, giving him a hard one. I crumbled the paper into a ball and then threw it at him. His pupils grew small as I threw it, then he turned his head to me and threw the paper back at me. Once he threw the ball, I took a piece of paper and wrote a note. I was writing this note (from memory):

“Kenji, I know you don’t understand what this really means, but I’m not racist! Not every American is racist! I’m not even fully American, I’m part Japanese! Shut up, or else I’ll report you and your parents”

I threw the note at him. It was a long one, so he didn’t read it and instead threw it back at me. I was furiously red. At this point, it’s a surprise that nobody even noticed what was going on! Things were starting to heat up. Suddenly, you came into the scene. You touched my table with your bare hands and then looked at Kenji. “Wakarimasen yo ne?”, you asked. Kenji had a malicious smile on his face and placed his hand under his chin. “Ee, demo watashi wa shinjitsu ni tsuite kakimashita. Koko ni iru kono shōnen wa hito shusabetsu shugi-shadesu!”, Kenji laughed. You were furious, at least I think you were. You were close to punching Kenji, but you suddenly stopped. I looked at you with a feared face, then you looked back at me and stepped back from Kenji. Kenji was mad. He thought you would actually punch him. You were close to, but you stopped yourself. I commend you for that. You walked back to your seat once the teacher called you out. Your arms were flinging to the ground but your steps were strong. The teacher continued her lesson while I kept on looking at the side of your face. You looked back. As soon as you did, I looked away in an instant. I didn’t want you to notice me. I looked around the classroom again, then at the teacher. She was gorgeous. Maybe as gorgeous as Mrs. Delilah or even Garcia! Not

saying that I have a crush on them (they both have husbands), but they're physically neat. I wonder what's your opinion on our teacher.

Anyways, during break, I was walking towards the cafeteria to get my food. You already know my favorites. I ordered my food and carried on, until Kenji comes in and punched the back of my gut. "Ow!", I cried. I fell right into the floor, but thankfully not in my food. My food was safe. I took my head back to look at him. He had his whole gang now. His team full of mischiefs. "Barley, right? Heh. I didn't know foreigners like you ate food like onigiri!", Kenji said. I blew out of my nose. "Americans eat and love onigiri; I'm one of them", I answered as I stood up. I picked up my food while Kenji blew his hilariously long hair that formed a bang. "Is that so?", Kenji asked. I didn't respond with a word. I wanted this situation to be over ever since we stopped talking back in class, so I walked away as any child would when they're dealing with a tough situation. Once I did though, one of Kenji's friends blocked my way to my table. "Trying to run away, huh?", the friend snickered. "What a coward!", another friend laughed. I pushed the blocking friend away and carried onto my table.

Suddenly, Kenji pulled my shirt back and turned me to him. "Stop running away!", he commanded. I yelped and tried to find a way out but couldn't. Then you pushed Kenji aside. "Kore nan-kai iwanakya ikenai no!?", you yelled. Kenji chuckled some more. He looked for his friends, but nobody was there. I guess everyone was scared of you, Ken. Understandably so since you punched him moments later. You tackled him and kept on punching him. "Sutoppu! Sutoppu!", Kenji cried. You smiled and got up. Your smile turned into a concerned frown once you look at the injured Kenji and later the entire crowd watching the fight in fear. "Erm…", you sighed. I looked at you, with my breath feeling like it's running on its toes. The crowd walked

away, so did Kenji. “Anata wa bakagete iru!”, Kenji yelled. Everything was still foreign to me. Nonetheless, you brought your hand to me, pulling me up from the ground I was laying on. “I’m sorry”, you apologized. “Sorry for what?”, I asked. You put your hand on your shoulder and sighed as you said, “For scaring you. I understand if you’re scared or intimidated by me. I can get… aggressive sometimes”, you said. I understood immediately. I was surprised that you could even speak English! “I forgive you. I can get aggressive too, you know!”, I admitted. I picked up my food and paid my farewell to you as I walked to my table. I didn’t mind you much, yet again. I thought you were a friendly classmate who would stand up for me.

A week later, during PE, I was playing basketball with our classmates. I hit the first shot but after many attempts. It’s always an amazing feeling when you get the first shot! Did you know that I sometimes play basketball with my students? It’s a lot of fun playing with them. Most of the time, though, I teach them your skills. Anyways, when I was playing, you came up to me. “Hello, er…”. You were silent, trying your best to remember my name. “Barley. Barley Yuri”, I answered with a smile. I walked out of the court and sat on a bench with you. You looked surprised while we were walking.

“Your surname is Yuri, huh?”, you wondered. I nodded. “I thought you were truly American”, you said. “I’m not! I’m Asian-American, which means I’m part-American and part-Japanese”, I responded. I never told you that beforehand, so it’s no surprise you didn’t know at all. I should’ve done so. “Well, that doesn’t matter now”, you said. “Erm. Have you heard of samurais?”. It was sudden, but I answered anyways. “Have I? Of course I have!”, I chuckled, “Why did you ask?”. Your left foot was twirling across the ground. “I’m just asking you, that’s all”, you answered. It’s odd hearing that now. Now that you’re

a samurai. You were about to say something before I interrupted you. Your mouth was open right before I said, “Wait! I’m wondering about something”. You were awfully confused. “About what?”, you asked. “I want to know: Why is that Kenji boy hate foreigners so much? The entire school too!”, I asked. “Ah. As for Kenji: you see, he hates foreigners, mainly Americans, because one has discriminated him while he was on a vacation to Dallas”, you answered. I was surprised. So Kenji has been to America, I thought. “I don’t know for the school though”, you continued. I understood but didn’t say I word. “Thanks for telling me… er…”. I was trying to remember your name. “Ken”, you answered. “Yes! Ken! Arigatō, Ken”, I thanked. You smiled wide. A smile so wide that it made me smile. I walked away, ignoring what you were about to say about samurais. Only if I listened, huh?

The next day, it was history class. The teacher slapped her books onto her table as soon as the bell rung. “Kon'nichiwa minasan!”, she greeted. Everyone greeted back. My Japanese skills were getting better at that point, so my pronunciations had vastly improved and everything I said was profoundly pronounced. I hope you understood what I just wrote. The teacher seemed nice to me. She started to write on the whiteboard. Because she already introduced herself, she begun the lesson. “Kyō no ressun wa…”, she hyped us up. “Samurai ni tsuite!”, she giggled. Everyone’s eyes turned into stars, well, except me. I understood it was something about samurais, but not exactly about what. While everyone was smiling and getting their heart ready, I was confused. Puzzled about the lesson. I looked around just to see you. “Psst, what did she say?”, I asked. You didn’t look at me, but at the paper you were drawing in. You continued to answer me though. “She said that we’ll study about samurais. Samurais in general”, you answered. Once I heard that, I got as excited as our classmates.

“In case you didn't know, samurai are like secret agents in history!”, she said. She propped up her canvas and drew a simple interpretation of a samurai. “Well, they’re more than secret agents. Those jobs go to ninjas.”, she explained while drawing. “See, samurai are like this! At least in the old days, they were more privileged than the average Japanese. Samurai still exists, but they’re not as popular as they used to be.”, she continued. “Samurai… are basically like soldiers. They work for a higher power, much higher than you might imagine. They always hold a sword and will kill anyone if they need to. Many samurai use martial arts too!”.

I listened to the entire lecture. Samurai are truly interesting people, I thought. They weld a sword; isn’t that cool? Not only one, but sometimes two! Ah, the childish mindset I had. Back when things were simple. It’s bittersweet, isn’t it? During the lecture, I began to remember what you told me. You told me about samurais. I was starting to wonder if you had something to do with samurai. Seeing from now, you did. Once the lecture ended, she handed us worksheets. I was still dazed by what she said about samurais, even I didn’t know half of the things she said. I knew it was amazing. Once I got the worksheet, I looked at you and wanted to tell you about the conversation back in PE, but I was too shy to even open my mouth.

During break, I finally walked up to you. “Ken”, I poked your shoulder. You looked back and saw me. You wore a warm smile. “Oh, hello Barley!”, you smiled. You finally got my name right, and I knew you were proud of it. I was proud that I got your name right too. “I wanted to tell you something… about… that samurai thing”, I stuttered. You got what I meant and said, “I see. I wanted to tell you something else too, during PE”. I closed my mouth and waited for you to say something. “And?”, I said, waiting for you. “Er. Sorry if this is sudden,

but can we be friends?", you asked. My mouth was wide open. "Of course!", I yelled, hugging you. I gulped and got back, sweating. "Oops!", I chuckled. You smiled and chuckled. You were oddly silent afterward. I assume you were thinking to yourself? I don't know. You turned back to me as I held your hand. "Come on! Let's eat together", I laughed. I pulled you to the food court. I don't know if you were enjoying my hand-holding, but there we were.

Things were hitting off between us. We became closer and closer during this time. We got so close that at some point, you proposed us as partners in samurai training.

"Barley", you suddenly said while we were walking back home. "Yeah?", I asked. "I know this is sudden but…". Once you said that, I got excited for something. I know that, whenever you say that, you would announce something cool. "Could we please be… partners? As in: Partners while training to be samurai", you said.

I was jaw-dropped, but excited at the same time. "Do you really mean it!?", I yelled in happiness. "Of course! You seem to be as strong as me. You could play basketball while I can't!", you said. Tears of joy started to flow through my eye-sockets. "We'll be a great team, won't we?", you said as you wiped my tears. I nodded, not opening my mouth.

I told my parents that news afterward. I was surprised nobody in my family was against the idea, probably because samurai are well-known to be tough and scary in Japanese culture. Nonetheless, this is the beginning of our partnership and friendship.

Our future truly changed greatly at this point.

Translations:

Gaikoku hito=Foreigner

Wakarimasen yo ne= You don't understand, do you?

Ee, demo watashi wa shinjitsu ni tsuite kakimashita. Koko ni iru kono shōnen wa hito shusabetsu shugi-shadesu!=Yup, but I wrote about the truth. This boy here is racist!

Kore nan-kai iwanakya ikenai no!?= How many times do I have to say this?!

Sutoppu! Sutoppu!=Stop! Stop!

Anata wa bakagete iru!=You are ridiculous!

Kon'nichiwa minasan!=Hello everybody!

Kyō no ressun wa…=Today's lesson is...

Samurai ni tsuite!=About samurai!